

Washington, DC— Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), a member of House Armed Services Committee and House Education and Labor Committee, released a statement today following the passage of the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROS) Act (H.R. 3625), a bill he introduced to provide active duty military personnel with more leeway in applying for financial aid and repaying student loans. — "As someone who wore the cloth of this nation for 31 years, few things are more important to me than our obligation to support our military personnel in combat, returning veterans and their families." said Congressman Sestak. "The HEROS Act will ensure that those who are called to serve overseas as well as those who serve during national emergencies here at home are not harmed by the service they perform. It is critical, not only for those currently receiving relief from unnecessary financial burden while sacrificing for our country, but also for those who will serve our country in the future that these provisions be made permanent."

The HEROS Act, originally signed into law on August 18, 2003, allows the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education to grant temporary authority to waive specific provisions applicable under Title IV student financial aid programs that will then provide relief to students and borrowers serving on active duty or certain individuals otherwise adversely affected by a war or other military operation or a national emergency as was the case with Hurricane Katrina.

The waivers originally expired on September 30, 2005, but were extended by Public Law 109-78 (HR 2132) until September 30, 2007.

Today's HEROS Act, which was co-sponsored by House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller and Higher Education Subcommittee Chairman Ruben Hinojosa, will make the 2003 HEROS Act provisions permanent.

"The brave men and women who serve our country in Iraq, Afghanistan, and all around the world often face unique and complicated circumstances when paying back their federal student loans. This bill will help protect our troops from defaulting on their student loans or falling into financial hardship while they are busy serving our nation," said Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. "In addition this bill also protects emergency rescue and recovery workers – those who help rebuild our country after natural disasters. We must ensure that all Americans who serve our country in times of national need have access to an affordable education."

Specifically the law allows the Secretary of Education to:

Protect borrowers from further financial difficulty when they are called to serve

- Ensures that when a student withdraws from college because of his/her status as an affected individual, the Return of Title IV Funds requirement that grant overpayments be repaid is waived.
- Collection activities on a defaulted education loan may be halted for the time period during which a borrower is an affected individual.

Minimize administrative requirements without impacting the integrity of the federal student aid program

- Certain requests that previously required written documentation may be made orally by an affected individual or member of the borrower's family.

Adjust the calculation used to determine students' eligibility for aid for those whose financial circumstances change because the student or his or her parents are called to serve

- Encourages financial aid administrators to choose the method of determining financial need that is most beneficial to the affected individual and his/her family.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.